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SKETCHES OF INDIA.—V.

THE POET LAUREATE OF DELHI.

CALCUTTA, October 7.

THIS morning was showery like most of the mornings for a week past, but, notwithstanding the rain, I determined to go to see the Rajah Krishna, the Poet Laureate of the great Mogul. I had letters and packets for him from —, to whom he had sent some of his works, and from the American Oriental Society, who had just elected him a member in return for presents which he had made them.

Driving through the busy, dirty, and picturesque Loll Bazar, and down the Chitpore road, with its native shops for sweetmeats, provisions, and cheap goods of all sorts, and where low brick houses, plastered with mud, stand side by side with the large, neglected, but pretentious stone dwellings of rich Hindoo merchants, the streets crowded with creaking carts and a swarming population, whom my syce made himself hoarse in shouting at. We turned after half an hour into the quiet and ugly street called Lobha, or The Beautiful, Bazar, in which I had learned that the Rajah lived.

Stopping at the door of his house, which was pointed out to me by a poor water-carrier, I sent up my card and letters by a lazy-looking durban (doorkeeper), who guarded the entrance with a rusty sword. It was so long before any message came in return, that I had ample time to gain a full impression of the outside of the house. It was a large two-story building, so thickly coated with whitewash and dust, that even its corners had no sharpness of line, and the little ornamental mouldings over the numerous irregular and narrow windows were more than half obliterated. My Moonsee, to whom I had spoken of my intended visit, had told me that the house was "very much handsome," but I thought it very much otherwise. On the balustrade of the roof were perched a row of stupid crows; close by the door, sunning himself under the wall in the hottest place he could find, lay a beggar, who, without stirring, asked me for alms.

At length a dirty servant appeared with a message from the Rajah, politely expressing the satisfaction with which he should receive me. He led me through a dark, dirty, arched passage, into the muddy and rubbishy interior court, and then up a rickety wooden staircase into a long and vacant room. It was furnished in the imitative way, which is disappointingly characteristic of many of what are considered by the natives their finest houses, in which a tawdry and childish copy of second-rate English style is substituted for what is native to Hindoo manners, and appropriate to Hindoo modes of life. An unmeaning imitation of English fashions and tastes is a prevalent vice among a large class of Hindoos in Calcutta. They do not recognize the loss of dignity which is incurred by it, nor know how much less interesting they become the moment they adopt customs or modes of living, which have nothing to recommend them except the fact,

that they happen to be those of a superior race. The motives to this imitation are very various, and were a distinction preserved between what is worth imitating, and what should, on the contrary, be avoided, one might believe that they were, on the whole, respectable. But it generally happens that only what is least worth taking is adopted, and a miserable hybrid style, neither Hindoo nor English, with no honest character of its own, is the result. It is sometimes, indeed, amusing from its absurd incongruities.

There was but little furniture in this room of the Rajah's, but what there was was of English patterns and make, old fashioned, worn, dirty, and inappropriate, looking like pickings up from an auction room. On the bare white walls hung some colored French lithographs in varnished frames. On a marble-topped pier-table stood some cheap articles of porcelain and blown glass. The carpet was ragged; the small and muddy window panes were dim with dust and cobwebs, and the whole room had the look of the faded scene of a deserted theatre. In an adjoining apartment, the door of which was open, sat a scribe on his heels, writing on paper which he held in his hand. Outside the door a bareboned boy stood pulling the punkah over me.

In a few minutes the Rajah came in, a large, rather well-looking man, not dressed up in shawls and jewels as in the portrait prefixed to his poems, but in the everyday dress of white muslin, common to men of his rank, his mouth full of pawn, and his lips stained with its red juice.* In violation of the rule of Hindoo etiquette, a violation that has, however, become usual in Calcutta, he kept his shoes on in entering the room, but touching his forehead he greeted me politely. Asking me to be seated, he expressed his pleasure in the books and letters I had brought him, and said that he had not long before received a letter from the "late honorable Polk," in acknowledgment for a copy of his works, and that he had already sent copies of his various poems to the present President of the United States. After a series of commonplaces, he remarked, that in a day or two he would much honor himself by telling me that he had received my card, an intimation that the visit was to come to an end, and ottar of rose and betel nut being brought in by a servant, and offered me, I took my leave. It would be a piece of gross impoliteness, in making a formal visit upon a Hindoo, to rise before the signal for departure had been given by the host. And a well-mannered native, in calling upon you, always waits until requested to take his leave.

The next morning, very early, a showily dressed chuprassee† entered my room, at Spencer's hotel. Over his shoulder passed

* Pawn, which is chewed by all classes of natives in every part of India, is made of a few bits of the Areca, or Betel nut, a little shell lime, and catechu, done up in the fresh leaves of the Betel-plant. It has a pleasant mixed flavor of sweetness and astringency. The shops for its sale are among the most frequent in the bazars. It is frequently carried in little boxes, and offered to you by native acquaintances.

† A badge-servant, so called from his chupras, or badge of office.

a red band, and on it upon his breast was a silver plate, on which were engraved the name and titles of the Rajah Krishna. He handed me a note, which ran as follows: "The Royal Poet of Delhi, Maha Rajah Apurva Krishna Bahadoor, requests the honor of Mr. —'s company, at a tea-table, at his residence, in Sobha Bazar, on Monday, the 8th instant, at 7½ o'clock in the evening." The envelope was stamped with the Rajah's initials, after the most approved style, surmounted by a wreath. I, of course, accepted the invitation.

Monday evening was dark and rainy. On reaching the Rajah's door, no light nor attendant was visible. My syce called for the torch-bearer, and I got out and picked my way through the muddy passage and court to the foot of the stairs, where a belated servant met me with a lantern. He showed me to the room in which the Rajah was waiting my arrival. It was the same room in which he had received me before; but, like the Rajah himself, somewhat neater and more elegant in its appearance than it then had been, but very dimly lighted with a few glass wall-lamps. The only other guest was a half *Europeanized* Hindoo, who seemed to be the Rajah's medical adviser, a graduate of the Hindoo College, and one of the party of "Young Bengal," to one section of which the Rajah himself had some affinity.

"Young Bengal" is divided into two distinct sections. Both of them are composed of men who have more or less broken through the trammels of Hindooism, but one is made up of those who have freed themselves from its oppressive influence by force of mind, for the sake of liberty of thought and moral independence, and who gain respect and acquire dignity by their course; while the other is formed of those who have shaken off Hindooism, because of its restraints upon their loose inclinations, and have assumed a jaunty and disreputable imitation of English manners and Anglo-Indian vices, losing the respect both of their countrymen and of foreigners. These two classes, of course, include many individual varieties. There are those, for instance, who, while detesting and rejecting in their hearts the absurdities and despotism of the popular belief, are yet too timid, or too closely bound by affections and domestic relations, to profess openly their liberal sentiments, and lead lives of unmanly conformity and painful contradictions. Others refine Hindooism into a symbolical system of faith, and attach themselves to one or other of the prevalent schools of Eastern mystical philosophy. Very few incline toward Christianity, being repelled from it in the manner in which it is generally presented in the creeds of opposing sects, and many, perhaps the majority, of those who think at all, fall into a cold Deism, or a colder indifference. There is little hope of the regeneration of India from the efforts even of the best of "Young Bengal." They want union and combination. There is no great leader among them to show the way, and inspirit his followers along the hard path of reform. There is none to urge them to the assault. They

are like skirmishers around a rocky fortress, now and then firing at its solid walls an occasional musket shot, or approaching them with drums beating and banners flying, but with none of the desperate determination of real war.

Certainly our Rajah was not the man to scale the walls, nor was his poetry that of Tyrtæus. Lying on the table were beautiful manuscript copies of his works, which he had brought out for my admiration. They were exquisitely written by professed scribes, and some of them were superbly and profusely illuminated. Nothing of the kind that I had ever seen surpassed the brilliancy of color, and miniature delicacy of these illuminations, or the grace of the arabesque designs that bordered many of the pages, but they possessed little value as illustrations of life, and had no significance as works of Art. Neither painting nor sculpture have ever risen, save in a few exceptional instances, to a higher rank than that of purely imitative arts in the East. They possess no spiritual character, and even the architecture of India, splendid as it is, owes its chief splendor to exotic influences and foreign inspiration. One or two of the illuminations in these manuscripts were amusing specimens of native taste. They were pictures of celestial female figures, with butterfly wings, and in full dress. But the dresses were cut after the absurdest of absurd English fashions, with leg of mutton sleeves, incredibly short waists, and scant skirts, while the heads of these angelic beings were covered with brightly trimmed Leghorn hats. I looked to see other spirits with bell-crowned hats, top-boots, and spurs.

On another table lay a copy of the poems of the present Emperor of Delhi, a handsome folio, imperially bound in gilded scarlet, the gift of his majesty to his well-beloved laureate. Great men in the East write poetry with much ease, vicariously. Next to this imperial volume, in curious juxtaposition, was a book that had a peculiarly familiar look. I took it up—it was lettered "Everett's Orations." It was the gift of the author. The Emperor of Delhi and the Governor of Massachusetts side by side! What a fresh flavor of New England was in that book! I opened it, and fancied I was in the church at Cambridge, standing on Plymouth Rock, over which a palm-tree was waving, and looking at Bunker Hill Monument, from the top of which a muezzin was calling to prayers. "Do you personally acquaint Everett, Sahib?" asked the Rajah. "I have salaamed to him often," was my reply. "I pray you to regard this," said the poet, handing me a gold medal that he had received from some society in Europe. His fame had extended over three quarters of the globe.

At length, the tea-table was ready, and we were ceremoniously conducted into another apartment, in which was a large table handsomely spread with plate, transparent porcelain, and profuse vases of flowers, whose perfume overpowered the freshness of the air. The feast was entirely made up of Hindoo delicacies, dishes to be appreciated by those bred up in Hindoo tastes. It was in vain, and with fruitless struggles, that I endeavored to do justice to one rich confection after another that the Rajah begged to have the delight of seeing me eat. A single mouthful of some

of them might have been pleasant enough, but, in general, they were too greasy and high-flavored; and to make a meal of them was like making a meal of butter and brown sugar, mixed with "nutmegs and cinnamon, pepper and cloves."*

During the entertainment, two little sons of the Rajah were brought in, to behold the Feringhee. They were bright-eyed, and inquisitive, dressed up in red embroidered silks, hung over with gold ornaments. The Rajah was curious about America; he would like to send one of his sons to see that great country, but the form of government puzzled him. He had heard of Congress, and its two bodies; "I understand," said he, "quite same as House of Lords and Court of Directors." When I positively could taste no more, wine was brought, and the Rajah and his friend showed no scruple in partaking of it.

It was very dark when I took my leave, and though it was late, the street, poorly lighted by the dull lamps that hung in the open shops, was still full of passengers. In some of the huts the evening meal was being cooked over a blazing fire, which burned on the mud floor, with men, women and children, seated around it. The smoke poured out of the doorways, illuminated by the light within. Each interior was a picture waiting for its painter. The night was warm, and on the flat roofs, and on the mud platforms in front of the houses, lay sleepers wrapped in their unfolded garments. Everywhere dense life, till we reached the quiet streets about Government House, and scared a jackal who had crept in from the jungle, and was prowling about with thievish intentions.

During the remainder of my stay at Calcutta, I saw nothing more of the royal poet of Delhi, Maha Rajah Apurva Krishna Bahadour, whose name, literally translated, signifies, The Great Ruler Boundless Krishna the Brave. He sent me his works and his portrait gorgeous in jewels, shawls and turban, which I look at when I want to see how a poet laureate, Tennyson, for instance, ought to be dressed.

AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE.

(Published in a Periodical in 1843.)

WE have heard the learned in matters relating to Art, express the opinion that these United States are destined to form a new style of architecture. Remembering that a vast population, rich in material and guided by the experience, the precepts, and the models of the old world, was about to erect durable structures for every function of civilized life, we also cherished the hope that such a combination would speedily be formed.

We forgot that though the country was young, yet the people were old, that as Americans we have no childhood, no half-fabulous, legendary wealth, no misty, cloud-enveloped back-ground. We forgot that we had not unity of religious belief, nor unity of origin; that our territory, extending from the white bear to the alligator, made our occupations dissimilar, our character and tastes various. We forgot that

the Republic had leaped full-grown and armed to the teeth from the brain of her parent, and that a hammer had been the instrument of delivery. We forgot that reason had been the dry nurse of the giant offspring, and had fed her from the beginning with the stout bread and meat of fact; that every wry face the bantling ever made had been daguerreotyped, and all her words and deeds printed and labelled away in the pigeon-holes of official bureaux.

Reason can dissect, but cannot originate; she can adopt, but cannot create; she can modify, but cannot fiad. Give her but a cockboat, and she will elaborate a line of battle ship; give her but a beam with its wooden tooth, and she turns out the patent plough. She is not young, and when her friends insist upon the phenomena of youth, then is she least attractive. She can imitate the flush of the young cheek, but where is the flash of the young eye? She buys the teeth—alas! she cannot buy the breath of childhood. The puny cathedral of Broadway, like an elephant dwindled to the size of a dog, measures her yearning for Gothic sublimity, while the roar of the Astor-house, and the mammoth vase of the great reservoir, shows how she works when she feels at home, and is in earnest.

The mind of this country has never been seriously applied to the subject of building. Intently engaged in matters of more pressing importance, we have been content to receive our notions of architecture as we have received the fashion of our garments, and the form of our entertainments, from Europe. In our eagerness to appropriate we have neglected to adapt, to distinguish—nay, to understand. We have built small Gothic temples of wood, and have omitted all ornaments for economy, unmindful that size, material, and ornament are the elements of effect in that style of building. Captivated by the classic symmetry of the Athenial models, we have sought to bring the Parthenon into our streets, to make the temple of Theseus work in our towns. We have shorn them of their lateral colonnades, let them down from their dignified platform, pierced their walls for light, and, instead of the storied relief and the eloquent statue which enriched the frieze, and graced the pediment, we have made our chimney tops to peer over the broken profile, and tell by their rising smoke of the traffic and desecration of the interior. Still the model may be recognized, some of the architectural features are entire; like the captive king stripped alike of arms and purple, and drudging amid the Helots of a capital, the Greek temple as seen among us claims pity for its degraded majesty, and attests the barbarian force which has abused its nature, and been blind to its qualities.

If we trace architecture from its perfection, in the days of Pericles, to its manifest decay in the reign of Constantine, we shall find that one of the surest symptoms of decline was the adoption of admired forms and models for purposes not contemplated in their invention. The forum became a temple, the tribunal became a temple, the theatre was turned into a church; nay, the column, that organized member, that subordinate part, set up for itself, usurped unity, and was a monument! The great principles of architecture being once

* A description of one of these dishes may serve for that of a class. A paste of flour and water is strained through a sieve in drops into a pan of boiling ghee or oily butter, from which it is taken and made up, with sugar, almonds, raisins, and whole peppers, into balls. This is a much esteemed delicacy, and is considered very nice.